

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ACCRA 00284 121015Z
ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PINS, SHUM, GH
SUBJ: ACHEAMPONG MEETS THE PRESS

REF: (A) ACCRA 242 (B) ACCRA 245

1. ON JANUARY 10 HEAD OF STATE ACHEAMPONG HELD HIS ANNUAL MEETING WITH THE MEDIA AS PART OF SIXTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS OF 1972 COUP. IN ADDITION TO ANNOUNCING THAT GHANA WOULD SIGN A WINNING CONTRACT WITH A U.S. FIRM TO DRILL FOR OFF-SHORE OIL (REFTEL A), HE COMMENTED ON FOLLOWING SIGNIFICANT TOPICS AS WELL:

2. POLITICAL PRISONERS. HEAD OF STATE REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES THAT THERE ARE NO POLITICAL DETAINEES IN GHANA, ADDING THAT THOSE NOW IN PRISON ARE "CRIMINALS AND SUBVERSIONISTS" WHO WERE TRIED AND FOUND GUILTY IN THE COURTS. HE SAID THAT WHILE GOG BELIEVERS IN A POLICY OF RECONCILLATION, THIS DOES NOT MEAN "LICENSE TO ANARCHY" AND THAT THEREFORE THERE CAN BE NO AMNESTY FOR SUCH PRISONERS. (COMMENT: HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE OF GHANA BAR ASSOCIATION IS PRESSURING GOG TO RELEASE

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PAGE 02 ACCRA 00284 121015Z

451 PRISONERS IT SAYS ARE BEING HELD ILLEGALLY AND WITHOUT CHARGES BEING FILED AGAINST THEM. LAST MONTH GOG PUBLISHED A DECREE BELATEDLY GIVING A LEGAL BASIS TO THE DETENTION OF ABOUT 200 INDIVIDUALS -- THEY ARE NOW BEING DETAINED LEGALLY UNDER GHANA'S PREVENTIVE CUSTODY LAWS, ALTHOUGH STILL WITHOUT CHARGES BEING LEVIED AGAINST THEM. SOME HAD BEEN HELD SINCE 1972 WITHOUT BENEFIT

OF SUCH A DECREE. WE UNDERSTAND THAT MANY OF THESE INDIVIDUALS MAY BE THUGS RATHER THAN POLITICAL PRISONERS BUT GOG IS NOW SENSITIVE TO FACT THAT FROM TECHNICAL POINT OF VIEW THEY WERE BEING HELD ILLEGALLY. WE EXPECT ANOTHER DECREE TO COME OUT SOON REGULARIZING THE STATUS OF THE REMAINING 250-ODD DETAINEES, BUT WE DOUBT MANY, IF ANY, WILL BE RELEASED SOON. AS AN INTERESTING FOOT-NOTE, DURING THE PRESS CONFERENCE, ACHEAMPONG AT FIRST FORGOT TO DENY THERE ARE NAY POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THIS COUNTRY AND ANSWERED ONE QUESTION ON THIS SUBJECT BEFORE COMMISSIONER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS FELLI CAME UP AND WHISPERED IN HIS EAR. ACHEAMPONG THEN REMEMBERED HIS LINES AND MADE THE DENIAL.)

3. UNION GOVERNMENT. ACHEAMPONG ALSO DENIED RUMORS HE IS SEEKING TO BE PRESIDENT UNDER UNION GOVERNMENT, ARGUING THAT IT WILL BE THE DUTY OF CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY TO DECIDE HOW LEADERS SHOULD BE SELECTED AND THE 1979 ELECTIONS CONDUCTED. ASSEMBLY, HE SAID, WOULD ALSO DECIDE HOW MILITARY AND POLICE WOULD PARTICIPATE IN NEW GOVERNMENT. CONCERNING CANDIDATES FOR PARLIAMENT, HE NOTED THAT GOG ITSELF SHOULD SPONSOR THEIR ELECTION CAMPAIGNS TO PREVENT PAST ABUSES IN WHICH POOR CANDIDATES BORROWED HEAVILY TO WIN OFFICE AND THEN HAD TO RESORT TO ILLEGAL MEANS TO REPAY CREDITORS. ACHEAMPONG ADDED THAT IF THE PEOPLE REJECTED UNION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 ACCRA 00284 121015Z

GOVERNMENT, THE SOLDIERS WOULD GO BACK TO THE BARRACKS AND LET POLITICIANS SORT THINGS OUT BY THEMSELVES. (COMMENT: IT IS AN OPEN SECRET THAT ACHEAMPONG PLANS TO STAY ON AS PRESIDENT UNDER UNION GOVERNMENT. HIS DENIAL IS ONLY PRO FORMA.)

4. FOREIGN POLICY. ACHEAMPONG STATED THAT GHANA HAS NOT CHANGED ITS POLICIES ON MIDDLE EAST AND ZIMBABWE AND WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT OAU DECISIONS ON THESE ISSUES. HE CALLED ON ARABS TO RECOGNIZE RIGHT OF ISRAEL TO EXIST AND ON ISRAEL TO RECOGNIZE SOVEREIGN RIGHTS OF PALESTINIANS. HE ALSO PRAISED SADAT FOR HIS "SOLD STAND" ON MIDDLE EAST ISSUES. HE REITERATED THAT GHANA IS NOT TAKING SIDES IN THE ZIMBABWE DISPUTE BUT IS COMMITTED TO OAU DECISION TO SUPPORT PATRIOTIC FRONT. ENCOURAGING ONE FACTION OVER ANOTHER, HE REMARKED, IS TO ENCOURAGE POSSIBLE CIVIL WAR. (COMMENT: ACHEAMPONG BROKE NO NEW GROUND IN THESE REMARKS AND GHANA'S POSITIONS REMAIN UNCHANGED.)

5. DEBTS. HEAD OF STATE SAID GOG HAS PAID A TOTAL OF CEDIS 265.4 MILLION (DOLS 231 MILLION) OUT OF CEDIS

813.99 MILLION (DOLS 708 MILLION) OF EXTERNAL DEBTS
INHERITED WHEN IT CAME TO POWER IN 1972. (COMMENT:
PROGRESS HAS BEEN QUITE SLOW, PARTICULARLY ON SHORT-
TERM DEBTS. FOR LATEST ROUND-UP ON DEBT POSITION
AS IT AFFECTS U.S. FIRMS, SEE REFTEL B.)

6. ATMOSPHERICS OF PRESS CONFERENCE. TURNOUT OF LOCAL
PRESS CORPS AND DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY WAS GOOD. SEVERAL
FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS, INCLUDING DAVID OTTAWAY OF
WASHINGTON POST, WERE ALSO PRESENT AND ALLOWED TO
QUESTION ACHEAMPONG. (QUESTIONS HAD TO BE SUBMITTED
IN WRITING FIRST.) HEAD OF STATE WAS RELAXED, CON-
FIDENT AND FIELDDED QUESTIONS WELL (INCLUDING SEVERAL
WITH HOSTILE POLITICAL OVERTONES). ANNOUNCEMENT
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PAGE 04 ACCRA 00284 121015Z

OF WINNING CONTRACT, WHILE NOT UNEXPECTED, MET WITH
ENTHUSIASTIC APPLAUSE. ACHEAMPONG CLOSED THE PRESS
CONFERENCE BY SAYING HE WOULD "SEE US ALL NEXT YEAR." SMITH

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